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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
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ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN ON ITS SEVENTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

Rapporteur: Ms. Aurora JAVATE DE DIOS

Addendum

IV. CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

B. Consideration of reports

2. Initial and second periodic reports

Israel

1. The Committee considered the initial and second report of Israel (CEDAW/C/ISR/1-2) at its 350th, 351st and 353rd meetings, on 17 and 21 July 1997.

2. The representative of Israel indicated that her country saw the signing and ratification of the Convention as natural and important steps in the general process of ensuring the achievement of equality between women and men. She noted that Israel attached great importance to the process of reporting to the Committee and considered the latter to be a vehicle to achieve the advancement of women.

3. The representative observed that the compilation of the report had afforded an opportunity to take a comprehensive view of the achievements in and the obstacles to the advancement of women in Israel. It had created an institutional awareness of women's social concerns and needs. Non-governmental

organizations (NGOs) had had the opportunity to offer feedback on the report and this had led to a new forum of ongoing dialogue between government and civil society.

4. She stated that Israel placed great importance on the situation and status of women in society, and noted that the issue of women's status in society has constantly been on the national agenda. A constitutional and normative infrastructure had been established and a continuous process of review and passage of legislation was taking place with regard to the status of women. Implementation mechanisms had been established and developed according to need. She noted that this process applied equally to all women in Israel - Jewish and Arab alike.

5. The representative elaborated the two parameters informing women's status. The first reflected the basic quality of women's lives, and the second involved the evaluation of participation of women in public life, the workplace, wage equity and educational opportunities.

6. She noted that discrimination against women was defined by Israel's legal system in conformity with the definition contained in article 1 of the Convention. The principle of equality was understood as being substantive and not merely formal and took into account de facto discrimination and the importance of affirmative action.

7. Legislative developments had done much to advance the status of all women in Israel and played an important role in educating the younger generation and the public in general concerning the special norms adopted for the advancement of women. The process of instilling norms and values of gender equality was an ongoing one, and several important bills in this area were at different stages of the legislative process.

8. The representative described various governmental initiatives to promote the advancement of women. Among them were the appointment of the Prime Minister's Adviser on the Status of Women, and the Knesset Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women.

9. She indicated that education was a key factor in any real and stable change of perceptions and of gender roles. The reduction of illiteracy among women was encouraging and women's enrolment in universities was greater than that of men. Women's health was steadily improving among all population groups. Women's participation in the workforce was related to educational level and family situation but women had a greater tendency to work part time.

10. She explained that the scope of social and work-related benefits was one of the most influential factors affecting women's economic status in Israel. Maternity insurance and the system of alimony payments benefited women positively. Despite the lack of sufficient data on the economic situation of single-parent families headed by women, serious support to ensure legislation had been enacted.

11. The representative described the situation in Israel with regard to marriage, age of marriage, cohabitation, child custody, property distribution,

selection of family names and new reproductive technologies. She informed the Committee that much progress had been made with regard to gender-based violence in Israel. There had been legislative developments and the work of several investigative and reform committees had contributed extensively to these legislative as well as practical developments.

12. There was a lack of concrete data and information on the issues of prostitution and exploitation of women and the Israeli legal framework took an abolitionist approach to prostitution. The representative drew the Committee's attention to the position of certain groups of women in Israeli society, including Bedouin women, women immigrants from the former Soviet Union and from Ethiopia.

13. She stated that social patterns, gender roles and stereotyping affected the advancement of women in any society. Women's involvement in the media was an example of this; the position of women vis-à-vis the Israeli media was inconsistent. Although employment of women in the media and coverage of certain women's issues were increasing, stereotyping of women as sex objects and victims continued to some extent.

14. While there had been little progress in the advancement of women at the national political level, women's participation in local politics was more positive. Women's participation at the senior levels of government and civil service had showed gradual improvement as well. Following enactment of the relevant legislation, the introduction of affirmative action into the boards of directors of government companies and into the civil service had contributed significantly to the advancement of women.

15. The representative concluded by drawing the Committee's attention to the employment of women in the security and defence forces. That participation had received extensive attention and been the subject of debate because of the important social role played by army service in Israeli society. The "glass ceiling" phenomenon could be seen in the defence forces, with women's promotion taking, on average, nine months longer than that of men.

Concluding comments of the Committee

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

16. No basic law embodies the principle of equality or prohibits discrimination.

17. Israel maintains its reservations to articles 7 (b) and 16 of the Convention because women cannot become religious judges and because the religious laws that to a considerable degree govern family relations discriminate against women.

18. The persistence of a situation of conflict and violence between Jews and Palestinians hampers the implementation of the Convention and places much power in the hands of the army, where the most senior leadership posts are barred to women.

Positive aspects

19. The Government of Israel has submitted a very comprehensive and candid report, which deals with all the articles of the Convention in detail, from both legal and sociological standpoints.

20. Non-governmental organizations have considered this report and have submitted supplementary reports.

21. Israel for some time now has had advanced legislation on violence against women and equal employment opportunities.

22. Most Israeli women have a high level of education.

Principal areas of concern

23. Neither the Government nor the parliament has an overall plan consisting of the measures required to implement the Convention and the Beijing Platform fully.

24. There is no governmental machinery responsible for promoting and coordinating policies for women.

25. Non-Jewish women have worse living conditions than Jewish women. They have poorer health and a lower level of education, participate less in government service and employment in general and occupy hardly any decision-making posts.

26. There are still instances of polygamy, forced marriage and genital mutilation, as well as crimes of honour.

27. A very low percentage of women occupy political decision-making posts; this situation has barely changed over the years.

28. A marked disparity exists between the average earnings of women and men.

29. Many more women than men work in the informal sector and perform unpaid work.

30. The public health system allocates considerable resources to in vitro fertilization, yet contraceptives are not free of charge.

31. A large number of women are arrested for prostitution.

32. Despite the existing legislation, cases of violence against women still occur frequently.

Suggestions and recommendations

33. The right to equality and the prohibition of discrimination should be reflected in a basic law.

34. Israel should complete the secularization of its legislation on marriage and family relations and withdraw its reservations to the Convention.

35. The Government of Israel should ensure that the Convention is implemented throughout the territory under its jurisdiction.

36. The Committee repeats its conviction that, as stated in the preamble to the Convention, full development and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields, and it recommends to the Government of Israel the adoption of all necessary measures to ensure peace with the participation of all women, Jewish and Christian, Muslim and Druze alike, so that they may exercise their rights fully and so as to promote equality of opportunities in economic and social development, with particular attention being paid to women living in rural areas.

37. The Government or the parliament should adopt an overall plan for the implementation of the Convention and the Beijing Platform through specific measures and within a definite time-frame.

38. The Committee looks forward to the adoption of the bill creating the governmental machinery to be known as the "Authority on the Status of Women".

39. Steps should be taken to intensify the measures aimed at improving the health, education and employment of non-Jewish women, particularly those living in rural areas. In addition, their participation in the civil service and in decision-making posts should be increased.

40. The Committee recommends to the Government of Israel that it boost its efforts and expand its action to eliminate violence against women, especially violence within the family, in all communities.

41. The Government of Israel must take the necessary steps to eliminate forced marriages, genital mutilation, crimes of honour and polygamy, which cannot be justified on any cultural grounds.

42. The value of unpaid work should be included in the national accounts through satellite accounts.

43. Some of the resources allocated to the treatment of infertility should be used to study its causes and its prevention.

44. Contraceptives should be included among the medicines which the public health services supply free of charge.

45. The Committee would like Israel's next report to include information on:

The status of disabled women;

How indirect discrimination in the workplace is dealt with;

The leave entitlement of mothers and fathers for the birth of a baby or when they have young children, and the actual use made of such entitlement;

/...

The impact on the social roles of women and men of programmes aimed at changing stereotypes.

46. The Committee requested wide dissemination of the above concluding comments in Israel so as to make individuals aware of the steps that had been taken to ensure de facto equality for women and the further steps that are required in this regard.